

**Ways to Implement Word Processing into
Writing Instruction**

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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Muncie, Indiana

May, 1991

May 4, 1991

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One of the most difficult areas of language development is transforming spoken language into the printed word. The agonies which students endure as they develop their writing skills can be lessened by using a word processor to teach writing skills. The writing process can be broken into four main phases: prewriting/brainstorming, composing, revising, and editing. Each of these phases can be taught using a word processing program and a computer in the classroom. This paper includes software suggestions, ideas on how to incorporate the computer into each phase of the writing process, and a planning guide for implementing word processing in the elementary classroom.

There are a variety of word-processing software packages available that are structured for elementary students. Among the more popular packages are *Magic Slate II* by Sunburst, *Bank Street Writer III* by Scholastic, and *Appleworks 3.0* by Apple. After reviewing each of these packages, *Bank Street Writer* seems to be the easiest and most versatile program for elementary students. The program is usable on either the Apple IIc or the Apple IIe. The format of the program enables it to be a practical word processor for most elementary students third grade and up. The program currently retails for approximately eighty dollars. It may be possible to purchase the program for less through mail-order catalogs or computer magazines.

The *Bank Street* program has several features which makes it ideal for use with students who have little or no experience using a word processor. The program comes with a tutorial program which is divided in five lessons which focus on the various options of the word processor. As

students progress through their work and wish to make changes, the program asks for a confirmation before completing the process. This works as a safety valve to help avoid undesired or unexpected changes. While this feature is helpful with younger students, older students who are more experienced writers may become frustrated with this feature of the program. Using a more adult oriented program, such as Apple Works, with older students is an option that should not be ignored (Marsh,1985). *Bank Street Writer* has a separate spelling program available, if one is necessary.

Students should be given prior instruction in how the program works before attempting to use it for class work. The teacher should be familiar with the program and explain each step of the tutorial program through direct instruction. Students should be encouraged to save their work often to avoid the loss of their work due to power failures or computer related problems.

Once the students have been instructed how to use the program and have been given practice time to become familiar with it, the program can be used in class writing projects. Developing a chart with the basic commands and functions of the program would be helpful and time-saving to both teacher and student. A planning guide for teaching students how the program works is available at the end of this document. Prior to that, however, is the presentation of various ways that the computer can be used in each phase of the writing process.

The prewriting and brainstorming phase of the writing process can be accomplished in a variety of ways using the computer. One way in which the computer can be used to help students in the prewriting phase

is to place a list of story starters on a disk. When students are ready to begin writing, they can call up the story starter file and select one they like. An added benefit would be to have the list of story starters printed out for the students to refer to while they are at their seats. The file of story starters can be formatted in several ways. The student may be asked a series of questions to start the thinking process, or a list of first lines may be given for the child to work from. The file could simply be a list of topics from which the student must pick five and incorporate them into their work.

If the students are having problems generating ideas, the teacher may want to try a linguistic approach, such as creating a paragraph which has several blanks in it for the students to complete. As students progress through the paragraph, they should be required to extend and create more complex answers. This process helps writers who have difficulty getting started and those who need help with sentence structure. This example paragraph is an adaption of a similar paragraph prepared by Thao Le.

“My name is _____. I am _____
and _____. My favorite animal is _____.
I want to have my animals in my house because _____
_____. When I grow up, I want
_____ so that _____.
I have some good and sad memories about animals. For instance,
_____”(Le, 1989, p.
608).

After the paragraph has been completed, the student must save it onto a disk. The teacher may then check it for writing development in a mini-conference with the student. The information given in the paragraph may be used as the start of the student's next story. This activity develops

both writing and computer skills.

Another simple way to encourage the generation of writing ideas is to ask the students to list five to ten characteristics they associate with various themes. For example, the theme holidays may be chosen and four columns: Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Valentine's Day are created by the teacher. Have the students list the characteristics they associate with each holiday under the correct heading. Save this information onto a data disk. It can be used for an immediate project or saved for use later in the year. This type of activity works well for writing poetry.

There are many other ways to use the computer for brainstorming activities. In creating brainstorming activities remember to consider where they can be incorporated into the composition process. A hard copy or print out of the brainstormed ideas is beneficial for the student to have at their seats. This will save a lot of confusion and moving around as students try to remember the ideas they have created.

There is a general consensus among teachers at the elementary level, who have used the computer as a writing tool, that the composing phase should be done using pencil and paper (Pon, 1985). A variety of reasons support the paper and pencil approach. First, most young students do not possess rapid keyboarding skills. The process of thinking and writing in the composing stage is slowed by having to concentrate on typing the information into the computer. A second reason which supports using pencil and paper is the speed at which students develop their work. Children can work on their writing assignment quietly and in short blocks of time between subjects. Unless the word processing program is booted

and ready to be used, a student could waste valuable writing time waiting for the computer.

As students begin to finish their first drafts, they should be allowed to begin entering their story into the computer. Assigning students partners to work with during this phase is both time-saving and teacher-saving.

As the students enter their work, the partners can assist each other by reminding each other to insert punctuation, looking up spellings of difficult words, and asking questions about the content and style of the work (Moore, 1989). By having the students help each other, the teacher is free to concentrate on the rest of the class.

When working in pairs at the computer, students should be given approximately ten minutes to work on their project. The partners should then switch roles. Students should print their work so that revisions can continue while the students are at their seats. After the student has entered his work into the computer, he/she is ready to begin revising the work.

The revising phase differs from editing because revision is a process through which the writer makes changes that result in the writing becoming more satisfying to them (Porter, 1989). Revising is the addition and deletion of ideas, whereas, editing focuses on punctuation and other mechanics. For this reason, having the students work in pairs allows them to both give and receive suggestions to improve their work.

As the students work toward a finished product, they can continuously read and check each other's papers for errors. Therefore, when the students are confident that their work is ready to be read by an

adult, most of the needed corrections have been made.

There is a conflict among educators as to whether or not revision is improved by using a word processor. According to Collete Daiute, a Harvard Researcher, students often rephrase sentences and add details to the end of the text rather than complete revising. Students are less likely to reread and creatively expand their work when they do not have to recopy their drafts (Soloman, 1985).

However, other researchers have found that students are more willing to revise their writing when the recopying penalty is eliminated. As one student comments, "Instead of having to write reports freehand and getting writer's cramp, you can use the computer and save a lot of time, paper, and not have to scrub away spongy little eraser marks" (Moore).

By using a word processor to help students through the writing process, the teacher is also helped. The problem of messy handwriting and unreadable papers is reduced. The lost paper syndrome is also reduced. If the document has been saved, a new copy can be retrieved in minutes. Teachers can also check on each student's progress without having to collect and return papers. By checking the student's disk, the teacher can determine if that student is having problems and/or falling behind. These two time savers can be of great value as the students are revising their work.

Editing is the process by which the writer makes changes which benefit the reader. More attention should be placed on correct spelling, punctuation, and usage than on changes to the content of the work (Porter). One researcher recommends checking for one type of error at a time. For example, the first time a paper is read, only capitalization errors

are noted (Pon). It is also possible to use peer editing with the computer.

If the students were working in pairs, combine two pairs to create a group of four. Otherwise, group the students into groups of three or four. As each student's work appears on the screen, the group works to catch mistakes which need correcting. During this stage it is important to remember that the object is not to change the work. Students need to be reminded not to criticize another's work, but to help correct errors in spelling and mechanics. A group of four should be given approximately twenty minute blocks of time to accomplish the editing phase. If the students were following instructions, many common errors should have already been corrected while the paper was being revised. If a student's work needs more editing than is possible in the twenty minute block, he/she should be encouraged to return to the revising phase.

Following the peer editing stage, the teacher should review the student's work. By this time, the story should be ready to printed in its final form and read by the other students. Since printing is noisy and time consuming, the teacher may want to have a parent volunteer come in before or after school to help with the printing.

In an effort to make using the computer an orderly and undisruptive activity, the students should fully understand the scheduling system. The teacher should pair students according to the rate at which they finish their first drafts. These pairs will change with each new assignment allowing the students to work with different partners. Once the pairs are formed, a weekly chart should be made indicating which day the respective pairs are to use the computer. In a class of thirty students, a

schedule of three pairs of students a day should allow everyone to have some computer time each week. Schedule the students for half hour blocks. This allows each student fifteen minutes worktime. The students should only work at the computer while the rest of the class is engaged in practice activities or during free time.

While students are working at the computer, there are bound to be problems. A help signal should be devised for children working at the computer. Perhaps a brightly colored piece of paper pinned to a bulletin board, or a large help sign placed on the terminal would be appropriate. By utilizing the signal method, students using the computer do not have to leave the terminal and may be able to solve their own problems in the time it takes for the teacher to help them. This method also stops the students from disrupting the teacher who may be working with another student. If there is a major problem, allowing the students additional time at the computer would be reasonable.

In addition to developing a help sign, it would be time-saving to train a group of students to act as trouble shooters. If the trouble shooter cannot solve the problem, then the teacher's help should be requested. While students are waiting for assistance they should have an activity ready for them to work on. Perhaps a grammar review, language game, or similar writing related activity could be used (Pon).

It is safe to say that at least one disaster, if not more, will occur while the students are using the computer. It is a good idea to allow the students to run a print out of their work after major changes are made. If for some reason the disk is damaged or lost, the student would have more to work from than their memory. However, if a printer is not available for

your classroom, it would be impractical to try to print each student's work. In addition, the printer is noisy and could be distracting to the rest of the class. A second security measure would be to create a backup file of every student's work. This can become time consuming and slightly expensive, but worth the trouble if the other disks are lost or destroyed. All disks should be handled with care and kept in a safe, secure place . . . not a student's desk.

Even though beginning a computer program in the classroom may take time and create a wide range of problems, the benefits of using the computer are widespread. First, the students are learning computer skills and becoming more familiar and at ease working on the computer. Most likely, they will need these skills once they enter high school, college and the adult world. They are also learning the writing process. The students will be able to focus more on the process of writing rather than the product due to the fact that revisions and editing can be done so much easier. In addition, writing can be spread across the curriculum. By using the computer students can create files of math word problems, science experiments, social studies reports, and a variety of other materials for any elementary subject. Once students begin to write using the computer, it could be hard to stop them.

These ideas are suggestions on how to incorporate word processing into writing instruction in the elementary classroom. What follows is a plan to implement word processing into the elementary classroom.

A Day-by-Day Guide to Using Word Processing

September:

Week One: Have all the students bring in money to buy a disk. They will need a five and one-quarter inch floppy disk. Disks can be bought in bulk from various outlets. Before handing in the disk, the child's name should be placed on the label and the label attached to the disk.

Instruction on how to use the program consists of several components: care of disks, options of the program, saving, and retrieving. Students should be informed through direct instruction about care and handling of the disks. Students should be reminded not to touch the exposed parts of the disk or place them by magnets. After all the students have supplied a disk, the teacher needs to initialize them for use with the program.

Detailed instructions appear in *Bank Street Writer* guide.

Create a schedule which shows which students are to use the computer each day. Make sure the students realize that they are responsible for remembering to do the lesson sometime that day and complete their journal entry. Journals should be checked each week to verify that each student did the lesson.

Week Two: Begin to teach the students how to use the word processing program. The first lesson of the tutorial deals with entering text.

Day One: Show all the students how to start the computer and load the word processing program. Begin a journal which the students will complete as they finish each lesson of the tutorial. This journal will serve as their computer manual. Have the students write the command they learned and how to utilize it. While students are working the tutorial lessons, encourage them to practice correct keyboarding skills.

Day Two: Review with the students the first lesson of the *Bank Street Writer* tutorial. Allow the students approximately five to ten minutes of computer time each to complete the lesson.

Day Three : Continue with lesson one until each student has been given the chance to complete the lesson.

Day Four: Continue with individual practice.

Day Five: Continue with practice and review command.

Week Three:

Day One: Introduce the next lesson on the tutorial. This lesson details Cursor Movement and Correction. Explain the command. Again, allow each student approximately five to ten minutes to complete the lesson. Three to four students per half-hour block, three half-hour blocks a day during free or study time should allow all the students to finish the lesson by the end of the week.

Day Two: Continue with individual practice.

Day Three: Continue with individual practice.

Day Four: Review the command and continue practice.

Day Five: For students who need additional practice.

Week Four:

Day One: Introduce the next lesson. This lesson deals with the command Erase and Unerase. Allow students time to practice.

Day Two: Continue with individual practice.

Day Three: Continue with individual practice.

Day Four: Review the command and continue with practice.

Day Five: For students who need additional practice.

October:

Week One:

Day One: Introduce lesson four of the tutorial. This lesson deals with the command Move and Moveback. Allow individual practice time.

Day Two: Continue with individual practice.

Day Three: Continue with individual practice.

Day Four: Continue with practice and review the command.

Day Five: For students who need additional practice time.

Week Two:

Day One: Introduce the final lesson of the tutorial program. This lesson deals with the Find and Replace command. Allow for individual practice.

Day Two: Continue with individual practice.

Day Three: Continue with individual practice.

Day Four: Review all the commands learned. Announce a test over the commands for the next day. Students should be able to study the commands from their journals.

Day Five: Test over the commands.

Week Three:

Day One: Introduce the "save" command. List the steps needed to save a document and place it near the computer. Make sure all of the student's disks are initialized.

Day Two: Practice activity for the "save" command. Have each student enter a series of questions and answers into the computer. Once

they have the information entered, have them save the text onto their disk. The disks should be placed in alphabetical order in a storage box next to the computer. The disks should be returned to a secure place at the end of the day. Allow each student around ten minutes to complete this activity. Name the activity "(student's initials) Q/A". The students should remember to enter this command into their journal.

Day Three: Continue with the "save" activity.

Day Four: Continue with the "save" activity.

Day Five: Finish the "save" activity.

Week Four:

Day One: Introduce "catalog" and "retrieve" commands of the program. The catalog function lists all the files on the disk by name. when you wish to select a file, type in the name. By typing in the file name and pressing "return", you are utilizing the "retrieve" function. Have students retrieve the practice activity for the "save" command. The students should make some changes to the document and then resave it under the same name (tab to transfer, return; tab to save, return).

Day Two: Continue with this activity in ten minute blocks.

Day Three: Continue with this activity.

Day Four: Continue with this activity.

Day Five: Continue with this activity.

November:

The students should now be familiar with all the commands necessary to use the word processor efficiently. They also have their own reference manual to refer to in case of problems. Now the fun begins, actually completing writing assignments using the computer. The ideas previously presented are intended to help the teacher determine how to incorporate the computer into the classroom writing time. Remember, if

there are too many managerial problems using the computer, stop. Try it again on another day or in a different stage of the writing process, but do not give up on it entirely. Both the teacher and students will benefit and enjoy using the computer as it becomes more familiar.

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Publishing and Sharing

Appendix One

Not all of the writing assignments a student completes should be designated for sharing. Students should be able to explore and develop different writing styles without having to worry about who will see their work. There are times, however, that the students should be able to learn from each other through sharing their writing.

When preparing to publish a student's work, valuable time and paper can be saved if the teacher reviews each student's work while it is still in the computer. Once all the usage and mechanical errors have been corrected, the piece is ready to be printed. Printing should be done after school, during a free period, or in another room. The sound of the printer can become annoying to both teacher and student if it is printing while direct instruction is taking place.

Once the students' work has been printed, the teacher may encourage the students to make covers for their work, or bind all the stories together for a class book. For sharing purposes, individual binding is preferred. By individually binding the books, students can trade and read more of their classmates work than if all the stories were in one book.

Binding can be done by stapling, tying the pages with bright colored string, using brass paper fasteners, and many other ways. For the adventurous, sewing the pages may be an option. This is time consuming and difficult for many children. "No-fuss" binding can be done by placing the student's work in a folder and allowing them to decorate it. The folders can also be reused for the next piece published. Binding can be as simple or complex and the teacher wants it to be.

Once the students' work has been published, encourage them to let

others read it. Students' writing can be great additions to the classroom library. These writings can serve as models for students who do not enjoy or have difficulty writing. Publishing can also be seen as a self-confidence booster. An unpopular student may end up writing the best story and therefore gain acceptance from his/her peers.

Students' writing can be a good starting point for discussions on various aspects of the writing process. Topics for discussion could include: character development, plot development, setting, word selection, theme, and many other topics. When using a student's work as an example, focus on the positive aspects of the story. Do not criticize a student's work in front of the whole class or use it as an example of poor writing. This could be devastating to the student. A good idea would be to ask the student for permission to use his/her work beforehand.

Publishing is not the only way that sharing can take place in the classroom. The students may enjoy reading the stories aloud to the rest of the class. If older students wrote the stories, they may be interested in reading and explaining how they wrote them to younger students. The younger students are therefore presented with good writing role-models.

However sharing occurs, it should be optional. Students should not feel that they have to share their stories. For many, writing is very personal and it may be embarrassing for some to have to let others view their work. Do not stifle a growing writer by scaring him/her with the prospect of others reading their work.

Writing Ideas Throughout the Year

Appendix Two

Students' favorite question when given a writing assignment seems to be "What should I write about?" These ideas are arranged by the months of the school year. The next time a student asks "What should I write about?", suggest one of these topics.

September:

1. Have students find a fallen leaf from a tree near their home or school. Once they have picked the leaf, have them write an imaginary life story of the leaf.
2. September 26th is Johnny Appleseed Day. Have the students write a poem about apples or Johnny Appleseed.*

October:

1. Fire Prevention Week: Have the students write letters to area fire fighters to thank them for protecting them. Another idea is to publish a class book of fire prevention and safety rules.
2. Halloween is great writing topic.

November:

1. Cookie Monster's birthday is on November 10th. Have the students write him birthday cards.*
2. Have the student's write Tom Turkey's life story. Any other Thanksgiving topic would also work well. Writing recipes is also a good Thanksgiving idea.

December:

1. Create a series of unusual holiday story starters. For example:
Santa Claus's elves caught the chicken pox and could not make toys. What was he going to do?*
2. Using their favorite nursery rhyme, have the students change the words to a holiday rhyme.

January:

1. Several famous people were born in January. Have the students research them and write a biographies of these people. Some of the famous people born in January include:

Paul Revere	Betsy Ross	Albert Schweitzer
Jacob Grimm	Louis Braille	Benedict Arnold
A. A. Milne	Lewis Carroll	Franz Schubert
Daniel Webster	Ben Franklin	Carl Sandburg
John Hancock		Martin Luther King
George Washington Carver*		

2. A variety of writing assignments can be made which refer to Martin Luther King Day.

February:

1. Have students write a letter to the groundhog explaining why they want him to see or not to see his shadow.*
2. George Washington, Abe Lincoln, and Susan B. Anthony(Feb. 15) all have birthdays during February.
3. February is also Black History Month. Take time to research and write about famous Black Americans.

March:

1. Write what life would be like for a Leprechaun.
2. Write a St. Patrick's Day poem using as many St. Patrick's Day words as possible.*

April:

1. Write about flowers, storms, kites, or other spring activities.
2. Have students write letters to the Easter Bunny or poems about Easter.

May:

1. Have students write letters to their mothers for Mother's Day.
2. Have students write how they feel about the past year and their expectations for the coming year.

These ideas can be used anytime during the year:

1. Have a bag of words to use as story starters. Have a student pick five words out of the bag and include these five words in their story.
2. Write a recipe based on strange ingredients. For example:

Robber's Pie

1 Robber
2 bags of money
1 banana peel
4 Eye-witnesses

Include all of the ingredients into the story.*

3. Start a story and have each student add a sentence or two to the story. They can only see the last line added to the story. Then read the story aloud to the class.
4. Write an ad for the student's least favorite belonging. Compile these ads in a classroom "Not-Wanted Ad".*
5. Have students pick a country of the world and write a description of how that country's flag looks. Another student should be able to draw the flag based on the written description.
6. Have students modernize their favorite fairy tale.
7. Pick a day and have the students write about what they see happening outside the classroom window.
8. Have the students write about their favorite author. Famous Children's Authors by Shirley Norby and Gregory Ryan provide short biographies of many popular children's authors.

The ideas above which are marked with an asterisk were taken from:

The Big Book of Absolutely Everything which is published by Edgell Communications, Inc. which is available through Instructor Book Club.